

INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL VARIETIES OF LATVIAN LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Language, including local varieties, is an important component of national identity – subdialects and dialects, as well as Latgalian written language promote awareness and strengthening of regional identity and enrich the national language as a whole. Therefore, it is important that attention is paid to all language varieties.

During the last decades regional varieties of Latvian language have not received sufficient coverage in learning content – there is either no information about them in learning materials or it is minimal. As a result, students not only do not acquire necessary linguistic, cultural and historical knowledge but also their language skills are not being fully developed.

The article describes an experience that was gained in Latvian language classes while using developed lingvodidactic material to promote an understanding of regionalist issues.

In the study, surveys, content analysis and case study methods were used. In trial operation it was determined that 10th-grade students do not have knowledge about regional varieties of the Latvian language, their history and importance in the development of Latvian language. Using the developed lingvodidactic material, students' knowledge of Latvian dialects, subdialects and the Latgalian written language has improved. The ability to recognize differences between dialects and to acquire necessary information has improved as well as interest in the regional diversity of the Latvian language has been created which promoted development of an overall respectful attitude towards the Latvian language.

The study results are consistent with conclusions from other studies and demonstrate consequences of imperfections in learning content which negatively affect students' consciousness of national and cultural identity. The situation can be significantly improved by including students' age-appropriate lingvodidactic material in the Latvian language learning content.

Keywords: *dialects, Latgalian written language, learning content, regional studies, subdialects*

Introduction

The linguistic landscape of Latvia is characterized by the coexistence of different languages, as the basic main principle of the Latvian language policy is that “the Latvian language is the state language in Latvia and the state guarantees Latvian minorities

the opportunity to preserve, develop and use their languages in certain functions” (Kļava, 2011, 16). Consequently, the inhabitants of Latvia are mostly bilingual or multilingual. In Latvia, more than 90% of the students surveyed communicate in two or more languages on a daily basis (Kļava & Rozenvalde, 2021, 54). As the Latvian language developed in time and space, its various forms were created – both regional and the standard language with its everyday colloquial variant, as well as sociolects. The Latvian language has three dialects: The Central dialect (also Middle dialect), Livonic dialect and High Latvian dialect. They historically altogether contain 512 subdialects. Central dialect is spoken in central Vidzeme, Zemgale and in Southern Courland and is the basis of Standard Latvian. Livonic dialect is spoken in Northern Courland and Northwestern Vidzeme. High Latvian dialect is spoken in Eastern Vidzeme, Sēlija and Latgale (see Kurzemniece et al., 2022). Latgalian written language – a historical variety of Latvian – has existed since the 18th century and is based on the subdialects spoken in southern Latgale (Stafecka, 2017).

Livonic dialect has been influenced by the language of Livonians – autochthon population of Latvia. Livonian language belongs to the Finnic branch of the Uralic language family and is one of the critically endangered languages.

Latvian diglossia or polyglossia is formed due to the fact that most people use not only the standard language and at least one foreign language, but also use the native dialect along with the standard language, especially rural residents of the older and middle generation. In Latgale, some people use the Latgalian written language, especially when reading books and publications in the press. Therefore, it is important that during the learning process, due attention is paid to getting to know all the varieties of the Latvian language. Marta Rudzīte believed that society as a whole should be aware that idioms are the main source of the history of our language, knowledge of them contributes to the development of literary language norms and the creation of terms (Rudzīte, 2005, 17). On the other hand, the historical significance of the Latgalian written language and, consequently, the need to familiarize society with its history is revealed in the recognition that “the Latgalian written language, which began in 1753 with translations of the gospels, in the course of history ... have played an important role in the preservation of Latvian identity, including local forms in the Latgale region” (Stafecka, 2017, 64), since “Latgalian writing, despite the ban on printing and the Russification policy, has been an important pillar of Latvian identity for centuries.” (Sperga, 2011, 22–23).

It should be remembered that the result achieved in civic education is also manifested in the students’ attitude towards themselves, other people, society as a whole, and the country (Jurs & Samuseviča, 2020), and the attitude towards the mother tongue is essential in the formation of local and national identity. Therefore, it seems all the more incomprehensible that in the Latvian language teaching materials published in the 21st century, regional issues are either not mentioned at all, or just a few paragraphs are devoted to them in a couple of textbooks for primary and secondary education (Vulāne & Stikute, 2016). Moreover, unlike in other countries (see, e.g., Cheshire et al., 1989; Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007), these issues have not even been discussed among Latvian

education specialists for years, although, as Mortad-Serir Ilhem points out “.. the tendency to devalue the child’s first language or to sideline it may make him lose confidence and become feeble in his/her powers in speech.” (Ilhem, 2013).

Ignoring the importance of the native dialect in a child’s development comes into conflict with the conclusions of modern linguists, especially sociolinguists in a number of countries, about the need to familiarize and even use regional dialects at school (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998; Adger et al., 2007; Holms, 2013; Tegegne, 2015, 2016). This has led to a situation where parents in many families avoid using their subdialect in communication. In education, whether students will be provided with the opportunity to become more familiar with the regional varieties of the Latvian language actually depends only on the teacher’s desire to develop appropriate materials and include them in the syllabus, which, given the overload of Latvian language and literature teachers, is a significant problem.

The purpose of this study was to find out the opinion of Latvian language teachers and secondary school students about the need to include the aforementioned topics in the curriculum and to assess the suitability of the developed language didactic material for the development of the linguistic competence of secondary school students by getting to know the regional varieties of the Latvian language.

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Methodology

To identify the problem in the syllabus, a content analysis was carried out (Krippendorff, 2004) in order to investigate the requirements set out in the standards for the subject “Latvian language” for familiarization with dialects and the written language of Latgale and plans for implementation of the stated aims within the exemplary programs, availability of relevant content in the educational medium and other resources.

In order to get as complete an idea as possible about the context of acquaintance with regional varieties of the Latvian language, the positions of sociolinguistics and linguo-didactics, the motives of teachers and students to delve into the proposed topic or ignore it, a case analysis was used (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003; Neuman, 2003).

In order to find out the consequences of shortcomings in the curriculum, secondary school students and teachers of the Latvian language were asked to fill out an anonymous and voluntary questionnaire.

The sample for the study was random. Teachers and pupils were surveyed remotely through a web survey. Potential participants – teachers of Latvian language and literature from the cultural regions of Vidzeme, Latgale, Selija, Zemgale, and Kurzeme – were informed about the survey in two ways: (a) by sending an e-mail to secondary schools with a link to the survey and an invitation to fill it out, along with encouragement for students to do the same; (b) by posting the survey and an invitation to fill it out on social networks.

The questionnaire included both content and filter questions, as well as closed and open questions. All respondents were required to indicate the cultural and historical region (Vidzeme, Latgale, Sēlija, Zemgale or Kurzeme) in which the school is located, students were also required to indicate the class they study in, and teachers were required to provide information about which class group they work in and what their work experience is. The questionnaires were filled in by 125 students and 100 teachers.

Pilot activities took place in one of the secondary schools in Vidzeme from 28 February 2022 to 2 May 2022 in the 10th grade, where there are 17 students. A nine-hour cycle was developed during which students were introduced to the regional varieties of the Latvian language and the results obtained were analysed.

Results

Regional language forms in the teaching content of the Latvian language in the 20th century

The inclusion of questions of general linguistics in the content of teaching the Latvian language in accordance with the age characteristics of students is a necessary component of the development of their linguistic intelligence (Gardner, 2011) and language competence when getting acquainted with regional forms of the language, which contributes to the study of the history and cultural experience of the relevant community, the awareness and strengthening of regional identity, thereby opening the way to the cultural heritage of the whole nation, enriches the ability of students to better understand works of art and other texts, as well as to express themselves in standard language at a higher level.

Issues of general linguistics have been dealt with in the Latvian language curriculum since the first half of the 20th century, with a compact overview of the history of the Latvian language, a comparison with related languages, as well as dialects and inflections (see, e.g., Endzelīns & Mīlenbachs, 1907, 1921; Ramāns, 1928). In the 1940s and 1960s, questions about regional forms were not included in school curricula and textbooks. An exception is the textbook edition of Anna Tirzmalā and Zigrīda Degļava, which contains information about the history of the Latvian language, the Baltic languages and their kinship, as well as about language researchers (Tirzmalā & Degļava, 1945, 4–6). It was only in 1963 that a secondary school textbook, which was published and then republished, again included brief information about the history of the Latvian language, dialects and linguists (Freidenfelds et al., 1963). A somewhat broader description of dialects and subdialects can be found in the textbook of the Latvian language “*Latviešu valoda 10.–12. klasei (Latvian language for grades 10–12.)*” (Apinis et al., 1988), but in the 20th century the only textbook that describes not only the dialects of the Latvian language, but also provides the most important information about the second Latvian writing tradition was published in the late 1990s under the title “*Latviešu valoda 10.-12. klasei (Latvian language for grades 10–12)*” (Kušķis et al., 1998, 10–30, 55–59).

Regional language forms in the teaching content of the Latvian language in the 21st century

At the level of primary and secondary education, the choice of the curriculum is determined by the standard of the subject based on which the programs are composed, therefore, the standards and sample programmes of the subject “Latvian language”, developed at the beginning of this century, as well as the standards of the Latvian language, exemplary programs and study materials under the *Skola2030* project (*Education 2030 Agenda*) were analysed.

The standard of the primary education developed at the beginning of the 21st century with later amendments (*Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības...*, 2014) does not mention the regional varieties of the Latvian language, while the standard of general secondary education (*Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās vidējās...*, 2013) stipulates that students should know the differences between the Latvian literary language and dialects of the Latvian language (for more details, see Vulāne & Stikute, 2016), however, the authors of the textbooks mostly did not follow the aforementioned standard.

In the period from 2016 to 2023, within the framework of the project “Competency-Based Approach to the Curriculum” (*Skola2030*), implemented by the State Education Content Centre, new standards for primary and secondary education in all subjects were developed and implemented. Sample programmes and fragmented learning materials were also prepared.

The State Primary Education Standard (*Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības...*, 2018) does not define any achievable result related to familiarization with regional varieties of the Latvian language. In the sample programme for learning the Latvian language (Lazdiņa & Šalme, 2018), the dialectal lexicon is briefly mentioned in the 9th grade in the cinematic language topic (Laiveniece, 2018, 261), learning through which students should be able to determine which words belong to which dialects, despite not having previously learned anything about dialects and subdialects.

During the secondary school stage, students should become much more familiar with the regional varieties of the Latvian language, as well as acquiring an idea of the Livonian language. The State Secondary Education Standard also states that students should be able to identify and distinguish between the Latvian literary language, dialects and colloquial language, creating an understanding of the diversity of the Latvian language and its use, describe the language situation in Latvia by analysing the Law on the State Language, learn about the status of the Latgalian written language and Livonian language, analyse the reflection of modern forms of the Latvian language – sociolect and regiolect – in literary works and make judgments about how and why the authors use the diverse Latvian language in works of art (*Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās vidējās...*, 2019).

The authors of the sample programme for learning the Latvian language (Lazdiņa et al., 2021) assumed that secondary school students would become familiar with the dialects of the Latvian language and the Latgalian written language by learning the topic “Diversity of the Latvian language”. If it is adequately covered in the curriculum, students could actually gain the necessary experience in learning the regional varieties of the Latvian language.

Among the educational materials published in the 21st century, two publications containing minimal information about the regional varieties of the Latvian language can be mentioned: the Latvian language textbook for grade 9, providing a brief overview of the dialects and Latgalian written language (Suhanova et al., 2005, 17–19), and “Latviešu valoda 9. klasei (*Latvian language for grade 9*)”, in which the dialects of the Latvian language are named and indicated on the map, while their brief description is also given (Veckāgana, 2014, 15–20). This book is still actively used in schools, including in the classes involved in the pilot activity. In addition, the main features of the dialects are transparently summarized on the website uzdevumi.lv. However, students have too little material to develop an understanding of the regional varieties of the Latvian language. In general, it can be concluded that the dialects of the Latvian language are treated superficially and fragmentarily in grade 9 of primary school. Even less attention is paid to the Latgalian written language, although the Law on the State Language stipulates that the state ensures the preservation, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as a historic form of the Latvian language (*Valsts valodas likums*, 1999). As Dite Liepa points out, this means “various opportunities for the development of this type of language, both in terms of linguistic research ... and in the field of education (for example, the inclusion of information about the Latgalian written language in the curriculum of schools and universities, support in the development of teaching and learning methods, study courses in universities and optional lessons in secondary schools)” (Liepa, 2016, 226).

The textbook “Latviešu valoda 11. klasei (*Latvian language for grade 11*)” is available for secondary school students on the e-media māconis.lv, it briefly describes the dialects of the Latvian language (Šūpola et al., 2010, 120–123), but only those students who use “Latviešu valodu vidusskolām, 1 (*Latvian language for secondary schools, 1*)” (Dalbiņa & Lāčauniece, 2010, 25–26) are able to get an idea of the Latgalian written language.

However, this does not mean that the teacher will not have materials to create the curriculum, because the issues of geolinguistics and Latvian linguistics are widely studied in Latvian linguistics. A rich literary material has been collected, descriptions of literature, collections of texts, dictionaries, monographs, scientific articles, as well as four volumes of the “Latviešu valodas dialektu atlants” (*Atlas of the Latvian Dialects*) and “Baltu valodu atlants” (*Atlas of the Baltic Languages*), an electronic book “Valodas rokasgrāmata” (*Language Textbook*), and “Lingvistiskā karte” (*Linguistic Map*) are available to students as educational aids in learning of the Latgalian written language. However, the adaptation of these materials for use in schools takes a lot of time, therefore, as experience shows, students either do not get acquainted with the regional varieties of the Latvian language at all or get only a superficial theoretical insight. This is a serious problem that has not been addressed in the education system for decades.

Results of the questionnaire of teachers

To find out what teachers’ experiences and opinions are as regards introducing the regional diversity of the Latvian language at school, a questionnaire was prepared

that included seven closed and five open questions. As already mentioned, 100 respondents from all cultural and historical regions of Latvia took part in the questionnaire (see Fig. 1) – 44% of teachers from Vidzeme, 27% from Latgale, 17% from Zemgale and 12% from Kurzeme.

76 teachers have been providing students with materials on the regional diversity of the Latvian language, 61% of them in grade 10, 49.4% in grade 9, 35.1% in grade 5 and 27.3% in grade 11. Several teachers indicated different grade groups as the teachers work with different curricula and have different experience.

Most teachers (62%) believe that this topic should be updated in all grade groups, but 20% of teachers believe that it should only be included in the secondary school curriculum. 8% of the respondents believe that regional varieties of the language should be introduced in grades 4–6, but 10% of the teachers surveyed believe that this topic should be discussed in grades 7–9. We have to agree with those teachers who believe that already at the stage of the primary education, students should be introduced to the regional varieties of the Latvian language in an age-appropriate way. This topic is completely ignored in the curriculum of teaching Latvian as a state language in minority schools, which is not considered a good solution. According to bachelor’s research conducted by the teacher Jete Zumente (Zumente, 2023), students from minority backgrounds can also successfully become interested in getting to know regional varieties of the Latvian language, thereby enriching their knowledge of the language and the country and its culture.

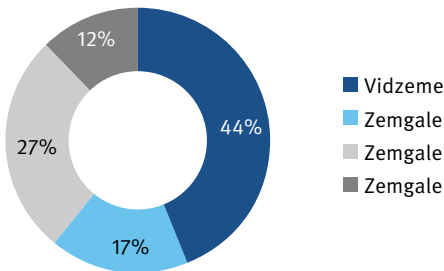


Figure 1 Regions represented by respondents

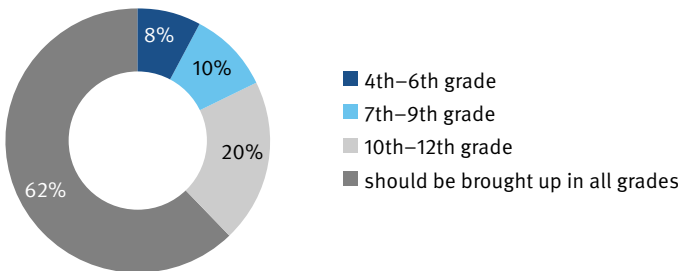


Figure 2 Age of learning about regional varieties, suggested by teachers

To successfully create an educational medium, it is important to determine both the amount of linguistic information that can be included in the teaching content, and the specific knowledge and skills that students can learn. Therefore, teachers were asked about the scope of the curriculum. 43% of the respondents believe that students should be able to name all dialects of the Latvian language and know their territorial distribution and main features. 24% of the teachers surveyed believe that, in addition to this, they should also be aware of the origin of dialects and be able to determine the dialect a subdialect belongs to. 30% of the respondents stated that it is enough to know what the notions a dialect and a subdialect mean and that they exist in the language. Some respondents (3%) have demonstrated specific knowledge and skills.

When asked how deeply one should know the Latgalian written language (Latgalian written language (LWL)) at school, 31% of the respondents indicated that students should know what the Latgalian written language is, how it was formed, where it is used, what is its significance in the cultural space of Latvia, while 17% of the teachers believe that they should know what LWL is, where it is used, what its main features are. A quarter (25%) of the teachers surveyed believe that it is enough if students know what the LWL is. On the other hand, 19% of the teachers stated that students should have an idea of the Latgalian written language, its history and be able to read a text written in it. It is significant that 12 of the respondents who chose this answer work in one of the schools in Latgale. Unfortunately, among the respondents there were also those who believe that the Latgalian written language should be taught only in schools in Latgale (5%) and that there is no such Latgalian written language at all, there is only a dialect (3%). Such an answer clearly underlines the consequences of the inadequacy of the curriculum, since this is the opinion of a fairly wide part of society (Vulāne & Šmatova, 2021).

The teachers were also asked to express their opinion on the suitability of an educational medium for learning the study topic. 46% of the respondents consider the information about regional varieties available in educational materials to be insufficient, 22% believe that there is almost enough information, 15% of the respondents say that there is enough information, 5% consider that there is no information at all, but no one believes that there is too much information provided. Obviously, there are two reasons for this diversity of opinion: (1) different learning resources are used, (2) there is a disagreement about how broadly these issues should be presented in the learning content. It should be noted that there is no correlation between the opinion on the sufficiency of information and the extent to which issues of regional diversity should be considered. It is indicative that five respondents who consider the information to be sufficient, use a wider range of learning resources, combining several books, including textbooks on the LWL.

Answering the question about which textbooks were used to study the regional varieties of the Latvian language, the teachers mostly indicated that it was a textbook (36%), more often mentioning the textbooks of the Latvian language under the title “Valodas labirinti. Latviešu valoda 9. klasei (*Labyrinths of language. Latvian language for grade 9*)” (Vanaga & Babrāne, 2006) and “Latviešu valoda 9. klasei (*Latvian language for grade 9*)” (Veckāgana 2014). The book “Latviešu valoda 10.–12. klasei (*Latvian language for grades 10–12*)” (Apinis et al., 1988) was also mentioned as a very informative teaching

aid. Only two respondents indicated *Skola2030* resources. 3 (3%) teachers in Latgale also use the LWL teaching aids. Presumably they teach the LWL as an optional course at school. Only 8 (8%) teachers admitted that they have to prepare everything themselves.

When asked whether other resources were used to study this topic, the majority of respondents (87%) answered in the affirmative. Mainly various electronic resources, folk songs, literary works, the program “Dzirdi balsis ar Kārli Kazāku” (*Hear voices with Kārlis Kazāks*) etc. were mentioned. Only two respondents indicated Atlases of Latvian dialects, and one mentioned dialect dictionaries.

When asked whether it is necessary to get acquainted with the works of Latgalian writers in terms of the literature content, 71% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, but 16% of teachers do not consider it necessary. 13% of teachers could not answer this question.

When asked whether efforts should be made to preserve the Latvian language dialects, the main answer (91% of the respondents) was that the dialects should definitely be preserved, as they are evidence of history, our intangible heritage, uniqueness, individuality and our roots. Seven teachers indicated that nothing should be artificially preserved, but two of them also emphasized that while it is now important to preserve the literary language, the dialects are not a priority issue today.

In order for the dialects to be preserved, the essential rule is that people use them in their daily speech. 72% of the respondents are convinced that parents should communicate with their children in their native language, as this is the only way to preserve national identity. Six of them added that it is important to speak literally correctly, so students should avoid dialectal interference in the standard language. 28% of respondents believe that this is a family choice and no one should influence this decision.

Results of the questionnaire of students

To determine the knowledge of students about the issue under study, a questionnaire was created, which was filled in by 125 students. 79% of students from Vidzeme, 9% from Zemgale, 7% from Kurzeme and 5% from Latgale participated in the questionnaire. Of these, 42.4% study in grade 11, 36.8% in grade 10, and 20.8% in grade 12.

88% of respondents indicated that they knew about the regional varieties of the Latvian language, 6% said that they did not know anything, another 6% answered that they did not remember.

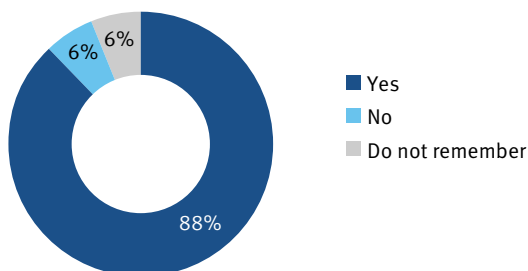


Figure 3 The number of students who have learned about regional varieties of the Latvian language

The superficiality of knowledge is confirmed by the answers and the next question, where the students had to write what a dialect is. 46% of the respondents answered that a dialect is a type of language, and about half of them indicated that it is characteristic of a certain locality/region. 18% of the students surveyed stated that a dialect is a collection of related subdialects, 14% of the respondents explained that this is a specific manner of speaking/style. 12% of the students explained the concept of a dialect as *language peculiarities in a certain region*. The answers of 27% of the respondents were incorrect, for example, six students associated the dialect with belonging to a social group, four of them named the peculiarities of writing and grammar. There were also answers that *a dialect is a form of a subdialect, different inflections of words, changes in stress, a language with different endings*, etc. Nine students indicated that they did not know or could not formulate an explanation of the dialect.

26% of the students described a subdialect as a type of language spoken in a small area, while 19% of the respondents said it was a more detailed subdivision of a dialect. 13% of the respondents answered that a subdialect is a special inflection of words, accent or emphasis, another 13% believed that *a subdialect is a feature of using the language, a special way of communicating*, etc. 12% of the students admitted that they do not know what a subdialect is, but 17% of the respondents' answers are completely wrong, for example, that a subdialect *is a region in which a dialect is used, characteristics of a dialect*, etc. So, only 46% of the students have a vague idea of what a subdialect is, but most have little or no understanding of it.

When answering the question why dialects and subdialects appear in the language, the students generally confirmed that they understand the reasons for their occurrence, but in general, answers were very general and only partially correct. Only one respondent had the exact answer: *Subdialects usually appear due to specific geographic, economic, or political conditions. The subdialects of the Latvian language appeared due to economic and political conditions – during serfdom, Latvian peasants were not allowed to leave the territory of their manor*. The majority (26%) of the students said that they did not know the answer, 18% of them answered that the differences arise due to geographical reasons, 14% of those surveyed believe that a combination of several conditions contributes to the regional diversity of the language, and 16% considered the influence of neighbouring countries to be the main reason. 17% of the respondents believe that the reason lies in historical circumstances, without specifying them, but 6% of the students mentioned social isolation, and 3% of them stated that the dialects of the Latvian language appeared under the influence of ancient tribal languages.

68% of the students know that there are about 500 subdialects of the Latvian language, the rest stated a much smaller number.

Knowledge of the division of dialects of the Latvian language is also imperfect. Only 49% of the students correctly marked all the dialects from the proposed options (*Central, Livonic and High Latvian*). Many of them chose the option *Latgale [Latgalian], Kurzemian or Vidzemian*. Apparently, students associated the names of dialects with the names of Latvia's cultural and historical regions Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Zemgale, Latgale not to

dialects. Only 48% of the respondents were able to correctly indicate the territorial distribution of dialects on the map. The most characteristic mistakes were the naming of the Livonic dialect as the *Livonian* or *Curonian* dialect, and the High Latvian dialect as the *Latgalian* dialect.

The ability of students to see dialect features in the text was also tested. The Middle dialect was recognized by 56% of the respondents, the Livonic dialect by 37%, and the High Latvian dialect was correctly named by 53% of the students. 6% of the respondents called the Livonic dialect the *Livonian* dialect, and 26% of the respondents called the High Latvian dialect the *Latgalian* or *Latgale* dialect. So, in general, the students saw the signs of the High Latvian dialect better, even though some of them used the wrong name for it.

The students' knowledge of the second written tradition of the Latvian language is the weakest of all. Only 13 respondents (10.4%) were able to accurately name the Latvian literary and LWL, eight more (6.4%) respondents answered inaccurately, mentioning the Latvian, Lower Latvian or literary and Latgalian languages, the rest of the respondents (83.2%) did not give any answer.

Answering the question of how widely one should know the Latgalian written language at school, the majority (35%) of the respondents believed that it is necessary to know how it was formed, where it is used and what is its significance in the cultural space of Latvia. 25% of the students believe that it is enough to know what the LWL is, what its features are and where it is used. 21% of the respondents stated that they should know what the LWL is in general, while 10% believed that there is no need to learn anything about the LWL, since it applies only to schools in Latgale. 9% of the students answered that there is no such language, there is only a dialect.

Respondents were asked to express their opinion on whether they should try to preserve the Latvian language's subdialects. 63% of the students believed that the subdialects of the Latvian language should be preserved, as it is our cultural heritage, they demonstrate the uniqueness and diversity of the language and are of historical value. Some students (4%) noted that the subdialects were interesting. 8% of respondents believed that the subdialects are of value, but they should not be preserved, because the language should be allowed to change. 5% admit that the subdialects should be preserved, but have not justified their opinion. 9% of the respondents believe that the dialects definitely should not be preserved, since it does not make sense to preserve them, and 11% of the students did not have any opinion on this issue.

At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to write what they would like to know about the regional diversity of the Latvian language. 45% of the students showed no interest in learning more about the regional varieties of the Latvian language. 20% of the respondents would like to know more about their origin and history, and 19% of the students would like to know only general information about regional varieties. 5% of the respondents are interested in their value today and their change over time. Only 4% of respondents showed a deep interest in the Latgalian written language, while 7% of the students did not answer the question.

However, these results cannot be generalized as the population surveyed was too limited, and not all regions were equally represented. It can be seen that most of the answers were given by teachers who look at the topic under study in the learning process, and by students who have learned something about the regional variants of the Latvian language.

Although the surveys were filled out by a small number of respondents, they shed light on several issues. Both teachers and students passively engage in surveys when they are conducted remotely.

Responses from teachers indicate that:

- at least the participating teachers in the study are aware of the necessity to provide students with an understanding of the diversity of the Latvian language, the significance of each of its forms,
- there is an acute need for teaching materials that fully incorporate modern content about Latvian language dialects and varieties, Latgalian written language, Livonian language...
- accessibility to scholarly works, including resources digitized in the Latvian National Library, needs to be ensured so that teachers can not only educate themselves but also use suitable materials in the teaching process,
- audio recordings and other resources that would enhance the enrichment of teaching content with language materials are necessary.

Responses from students reveal that:

- they have a desire to better understand the diversity of the Latvian language and an inertia in enriching their knowledge at the same time,
- there is inadequacy in superficial knowledge of facts about the Latvian language and understanding of industry-specific terminology,
- there is superficial knowledge and inadequacy in understanding Latvian history.

As the authors' experience shows, a significant reason is that the subject matter of the research is not allocated enough time in the teaching process. Moreover, getting acquainted with the regional varieties of the Latvian language usually has a sporadic nature – in a specific class, students are provided with a general overview of Latvian language dialects, not even mentioning Latgalian written language, which doesn't create interest and a desire to learn more, explore the history of dialects, their distinctive features, modern-day usage, etc.

Diversifying teaching materials not only with scholarly texts but also with contemporary audiovisual resources (songs, broadcasts, etc.) and establishing interdisciplinary connections with history and social sciences could generate greater interest and understanding of the regional diversity of the language.

Results of the pilot activities

In a study of the grade 10 students participating in the pilot activities, it was found that the students learned the topic of regional diversity in grade 9, however, as they admit, they do not remember anything. It is important that the students' interests and the choice of future profession also affect their motivation for learning. They do not consider

the Latvian language as a subject that could be of great importance in the planned professional field. This attitude stems from the prevailing stereotype in a large part of society that a good knowledge of the language is necessary only for specialists in the humanities sector, and results in corresponding academic performance, putting the Latvian language in last place in terms of the average score across all academic subjects. This aspect was taken into account when developing the content for the teaching process, in order to be able to promote interest in the students for whom the Latvian language is not of value. When assessing the students' knowledge of Latvian dialects and the Latvian written language, it was found that they lack factual knowledge, as most of them do not know what a dialect or subdialect is, or what the reasons are for their appearance. Only four students were able to correctly mark the territorial distribution of dialects on the map, but no one was able to name two writing traditions of the Latvian language. Only two students mentioned the Latvian literary language as one of the written traditions. When evaluating the answers of the students in percentage terms, an average score of 38.59% was obtained, which indicates a poor knowledge of regional varieties of the Latvian language.

Seven lessons were devoted to getting to know the regional varieties of the Latvian language, during which the students acquired knowledge about the dialects of the Latvian language and the Latvian written language, developed the ability to work with relevant texts and dialect maps, search and collect information, collaborate, discuss and present their achievements.

Using linguistic and historical information, maps and a fragment from the documentary "Baltu ciltis" (*Baltic tribes*), the students learned about the origin of the Latvian language and its dialects and subdialects. The students were very interested in the historical aspect, since they did not know anything about the Baltic tribes, their entry into the territory of Latvia and the Livonian tribe, tribal languages, etc. This indicates that this topic should definitely be more widely learned during the history lessons and is one of the ways to excite interest in the language.

Five lessons were devoted to getting to know the dialects and subdialects of the Latvian language. The students were provided with theoretical information, various audio-visual materials, the authentic sounding subdialects from the audio CD (Leikuma & Mežs, 2015) and songs from the cycle of programs "Dzirdi balsis ar Kārli Kazāku" (*Hear voices with Kārlis Kazāks*). In order for the learning content to be learned more fully, it is important that the students are active, so both productive and reproductive as well as interactive and creative tasks were developed, dialect maps were studied, information was searched in scientific literature and on various websites, written online discussion was created, etc.

An important part of the cycle of lessons was group work, during which it was necessary to study one of the groups of dialects of the Latvian language using scientific literature, dialect maps, find relevant examples in fiction or folklore materials, and then present the work done.

A separate lesson was devoted to getting acquainted with the Latgalian written language, which, of course, is not enough, but the students got an idea of the second written

tradition of our language, its importance in preserving Latvianness in Latgale during difficult stages of history. At the same time, they got acquainted with various resources and websites where more information could be obtained, which was completely new for the students. The fact that the Latgalian written language is widely used today in various fields was also highlighted.

In the process of learning, the concepts of the *Livonian language* and the *Livonic dialect* were mixed up, more difficulties were caused by the High Latvian dialect, which is most different from the Middle dialect and the standard language, as well as other tasks.

At the end of the cycle of lessons, the students wrote a control work, which, in terms of content, resonated with the diagnostic work. As a result, there has been a positive trend seen – the average score for the class was 67.35%. Thus, students' knowledge of the regional varieties of the Latvian language has reached at least a sufficient level. In the diagnostic work, there were much better results in the tasks in which knowledge about the causes, distribution, and features of the emergence of dialects and subdialects had to be demonstrated.

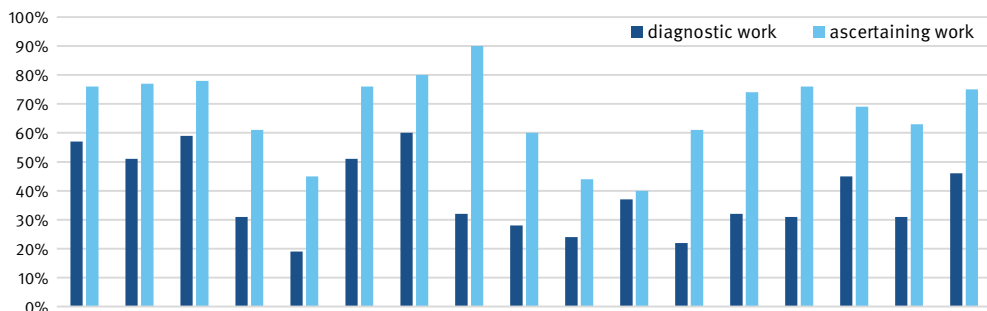


Figure 4 Results of diagnostic and control work

The opinion of the students about the meaning of the subdialects has also changed. If at the beginning of the pilot activities, only 11 students believed that the subdialects should be preserved, at the end of the lessons cycle already 16 students recognized the value of regional varieties of the Latvian language.

Approbation of language and didactic material proves that the best way to learn is to do it yourself, but knowledge is also needed. Particularly valuable was the group work, during which the students did their own research on a group of subdialects. It is important to have clear performance criteria and specify the sources to be used. The work done up front and the teacher's narration is also of great importance. With mini-lectures, both the content and the sequence and volume of information are controlled, which is especially important when there is a lot of information and time is limited. Taking into account the course of the learning process, it can be concluded that the High Latvian dialect is the most difficult one for the students to understand and is less familiar to them, moreover, the students do not want to use scientific literature as it is in a language they do not understand. This means that already at the stage of primary education, the students

should begin to form the habit of obtaining information from scientific sources, deepening their knowledge in secondary school. The ability of students to purposefully obtain factual information and critically evaluate it, make a list of references and references used needs improvement. It is desirable to include relevant cultural and historical information, audio-visual language materials, dialect maps in the teaching content, as this arouses interest among students and contributes to the desire to learn.

Conclusions

The results of the study resonate with the findings of other studies and clearly show the consequences of the shortcomings of the curriculum, which negatively affect the students' awareness of their national and cultural identity. In order to develop students' understanding of the regional diversity of the Latvian language, regular work is required at all stages of learning. Linguistic and cultural-historical information appropriate to the age of students should be included in the Latvian language teaching curriculum already at the stage of primary education, not only about the common national language but also about development, changes and linguistic and cultural-historical significance of its regional subdialects, expanding this topic into the secondary education curriculum.

In-service teacher education programs should offer various language didactic materials that would facilitate learning of the topic under study in Latvian language lessons. In addition, this topic should be updated not only in relation to languages, but also to other subjects, especially history and literature, creating a connection between subjects.

The students' achievements in using appropriate language didactic material in a cycle of seven lessons show its suitability for getting acquainted with the regional variants of the Latvian language. The students involved in the pilot activities improved their knowledge of the regional variants of the Latvian language to at least a sufficient level, as the average score improved by 28.68%. The opinion of students about the importance of linguistic diversity has changed – if at the beginning only 65% of the students believed that the regional varieties of the Latvian language are our cultural value, then by the end of the pilot project 94% did so. Since the students are reluctant to use scientific literature because it seems incomprehensible, appropriate linguists' works should be deliberately included in the teaching content, as well as papers and fragments of papers of other researchers in order to develop the scientific language of students and encourage them to work with scientific texts. It is also necessary to improve the ability of students to find scientifically correct sources of information, analyse them and internalize new knowledge, develop the ability to create references and compile a reference list.

In order to achieve good learning outcomes, it is important to develop teaching aids that contain both the necessary theoretical information and appropriate tasks for better familiarization with the regional varieties of the Latvian language, including the incorporation of audiovisual materials. The topic of Latvian language regional diversity should be revisited multiple times during the elementary and secondary school stage; it can also be integrated with other topics, thereby reinforcing and deepening knowledge. Meanwhile,

establishing interdisciplinary connections with other subjects (history, social sciences) would enable the comprehension of historical and social correlations in the development of language.

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